



Sri Lanka

Oct/Nov, 2025



Flag



Emblem



It was a tough beginning. The three hour, late night flight down from Bangkok landed in the rain. I made a poor choice of hotels (City Hotel) that had boards for the shower floor. In the morning., a large, black crow landed on the window sill and



did not want to leave due to the rain.I gave Marjan an option:

“ This is a democracy. Would you like me to call Thai Airways to book tickets to return to Bangkok today?”

“Well, let’s give it a day and see what happens.”

The breakfast on the the top floor restaurant was barely passable as a fellow came off the elevator to point his finger directly at me with a question.

“ Sir, how many children do you have?”

“ Five ”

“...to how many women? ”

“One”

“What is wrong with you ? I have 7 children to 9 women. I come here many times from Dubai for this hotel to sit by the window with my vodka for a relaxing holiday.”

My morning headache was assuaged a bit after this conversation.

The next person off the elevator was dressed with a shirt and tie who had a clean cut look. He extended his hand and announced,

“ My name is Zugumar and I would like to be your driver. “

From this point on our visit to Sri Lanka was on the positive upswing. He had a new Honda Vexal that cost \$70,000. For \$80/day (25,000 Rupees) he would tour the country with us; go anywhere





with no time limits. We wanted to visit the tea plantations, the cinnamon, the pepper, and the precious stone mines as well as the usual tourist sites. He offered to take us around Colombo today for money changing, supermarket, etc and get on our way to Kandy tomorrow morning. His advice:

“No need to make future hotel bookings because we do not have a fixed plan. We will arrive in whatever town and it’s evening. We will book a room for the night with no worry.”

A nice way of demonstrating the old and the new Sri Lanka.





The old Parliament building was a little trouble for Zugarmar when he lingered too long for the traffic cop. He was pausing so I could get a proper photo. The officer was truly upset but did not give him a fine.

The Gangaramaya Temple is the country's most important and revered Buddhist temple. It portrays Sri Lanka's history, cultural heritage as well as religion. It was built in the 19th century.

Loved the scrimshaw and the











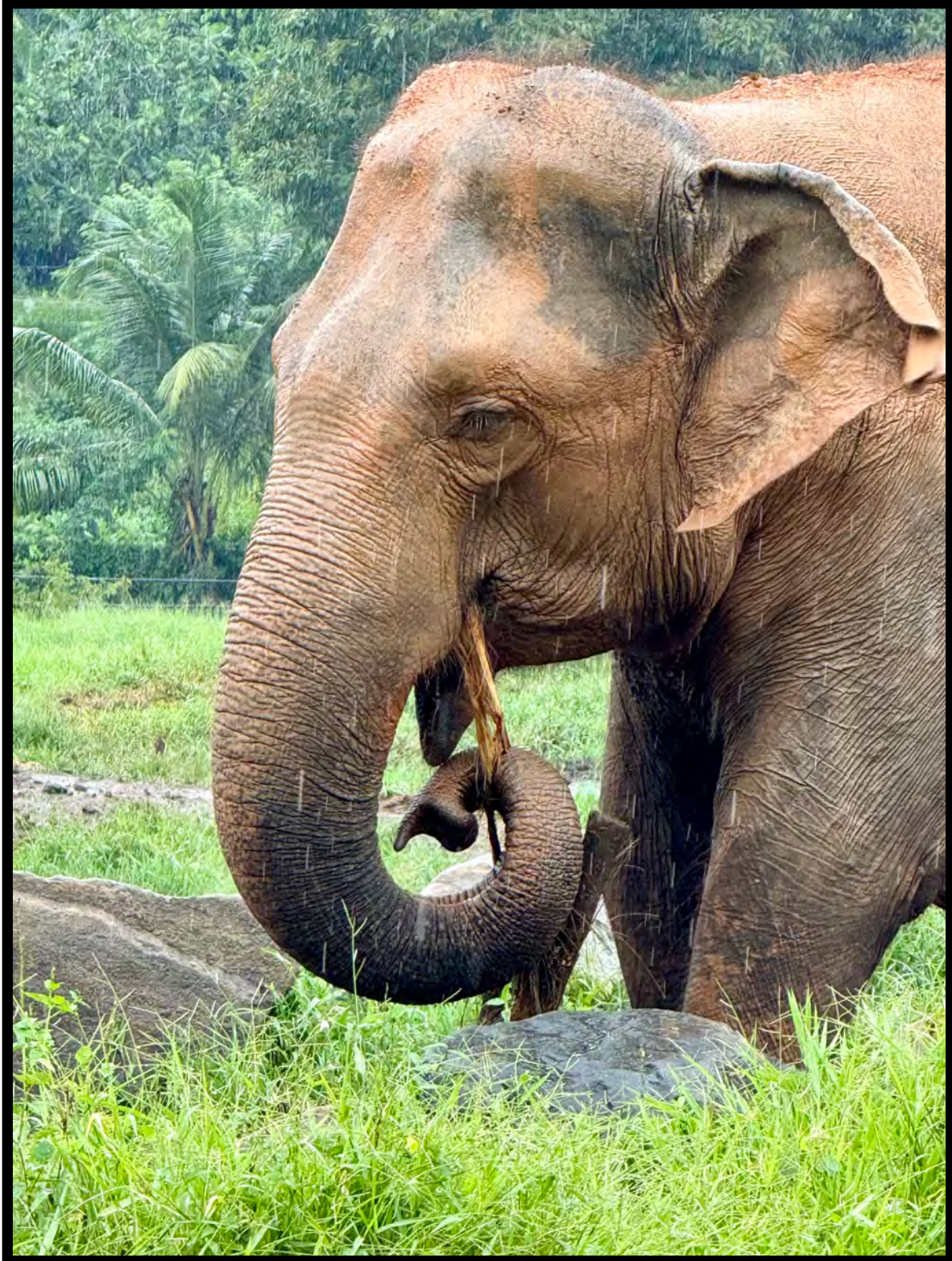
grandfathers clock in the museum.



We motored Northeast out of Colombo to the Pinnowala Elephant Reserve. The bronze work at the entrance at Sabaragam



was noteworthy. The whole compound was government operated so the elephants and the help live well. They provide a smorgasbord of photographic opportunities.







Sri Lanka, formally known as Ceylon, lies off the Southeast tip of India in the Indian Ocean. Twenty four million folks live on 26 million square miles of land. The national languages are Sinhalese and Tamil but English is fairly common. They are 70 % Buddhist, 13 % Hindu, 11% Islam and 6% Christian. They were a British colony from 1815-1948. Now they enjoy being a presidential republic. The people suffered from 1983-2009 during a civil war between the government forces and the Tamil Liberation Tigers. 100,000 people died during this war.

There is no McDonalds in the country because of a spice controversy with the sub letter company. McDonalds did not want the cheaper spices that the leasee company wanted so they left. However, the other foreign fast food restaurants are present. How about the customer at the Burger King. What an eye-catching sight! Long hair is definitely favored in Sri Lanka. School children wear



snow white uniforms, typically the girls will have two long braids gracing their backs. Sri Lanka has the best KFC that I have tasted anywhere. Large pieces beautifully spiced and not dry.

Kandy is the second largest city. We have driven many hours from Colombo without seeing open fields or forests; two lane road saturated with motorcycles, tuk tuks, cars



and trucks. Kandy lies in the foothills of higher and cooler elevations. It was the last capitol of the Sinhalese monarchy from 1469 to 1818. It is still considered to be the cultural capital of the country. The main attraction is the Temple of the a Tooth Relic, an



important place in the Buddhist world. It became a World heritage Site in 1988.



We stayed the second floor of the Cafe Aroma Restaurant that had multi colored tuk tuks outside. They were part of a group of ninety Australians who were with the Tuk Tuk Tournament. They were touring Sri Lanka by tuk tuk. The median age of the mixed group was 42 years. The travel company was based in Brisbane, Australia. The Tournament also does the same type tour in Cambodia and the Philippines. A hardy bunch, adults who could live like teenagers again. Would you please meet Mr. Bee with his



matching tuk tuk ! We would see them again in the coming days because we were all socially outgoing. Their conclusion was that the rainy days took away some fun but the total trip was worthwhile and special.

We discovered the best restaurant in the country was Barrista. Also. their lunch had Marjan perplexed on what dish to try first. She



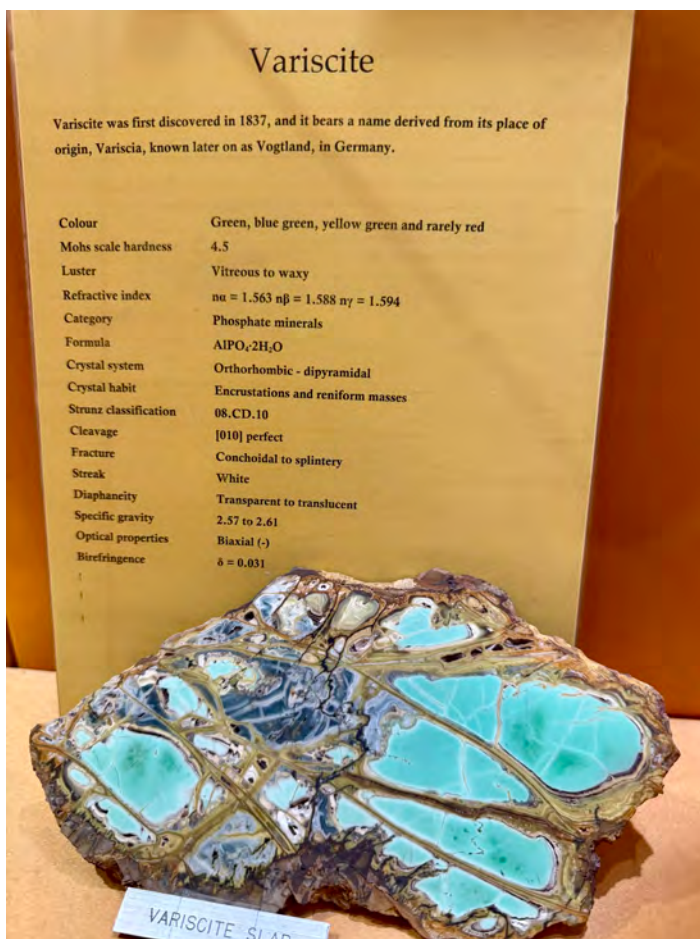
ordered the #83 of special rice and curry (6 vegetable curries, with chicken and fish).

SRI LANKAN SPECIAL DISHES (Served with Steamed Basmati Rice)	
83. Special Rice & Curry (6 vegetable Curries, Chicken/fish)	2390.00
84. Mixed Vegetable Curry	1890.00
85. Crab & Prawn Curry	2890.00
86. Prawns Curry	2490.00
87. Calamari (Cuttlefish) Curry	2590.00
88. Fish (Yellowfin Tuna) Curry	1990.00
89. Chicken Curry	1990.00
90. Egg Curry	1990.00



RED CHEF'S SPECIAL

The Sifani gems LTD had a colorful education of gemstones.



The Royal Botanical Garden was a spectacular display for plants that love rain.



A school for hibiscus



...And orchids and ?









A tuktuk will haul almost anything.
The Sri Lankan Dance has many moves and instruments





Tea

Sri Lanka is the fourth largest producer and the second greatest exporter of tea in the world. The central highlands with its abundant rainfall and cool, high humidity is ideal to produce high quality tea.



The planting was begun by James Taylor, an Englishman, in 1867. The area was also suitable for coffee production however in 1898 a fungal disease raided the area; also known as leaf rust, from which the industry never fully recovered.

The Bluefield Plantation offered a through look at the black tea story. We left the plantation in a ruggedly built Mahindra (India) by



public road to ascend the mountain. When we reentered the



plantation at the top end, we encountered rough, dirt lanes; with



abundant mud now and then we stopped at an employee camp. All residents were from India. They needed to pick 20 kilos (50 pounds)



per day to receive a wage of \$2,50. If they were faithful to the



plantation, they would be rewarded with Sri Lankan citizenship and passport. This was a wonderful opportunity for Indians from a lower caste. They have simple housing and enough clothes and food. There was even a small temple. We felt welcome here. The lane system





makes the plantation seem larger than 191 acres. There were a few graveyards along the way.

The scenery was graced by cascading waterfalls among thousands of tea bushes.





The tea is not picked; it is plucked from the 5 inches of young growth at the bush. It is then hauled to the factory to be driven and processed. Only 10 pounds of the tea originally plucked 50 pounds ends up in the cup. The other 40 pounds (stems) are thrown away.



We tasted nine versions of black tea with proper timeouts in-between. I liked them all but had to hold back a little on purchases.

Nuwara Eliya

A city of 28,000 people at 6128' elevation in the hill country. It overlooks Sri Lanka's tallest mountain (Pidurutalagala). The houses remind one of England which were built during the colonial years.



Our lodging was gorgeous to the eye but needed much renovation in actuality. We needed heat at night. The town is famous for its post office. It was fun to buy, address and mail postcards friends abroad because the facility still

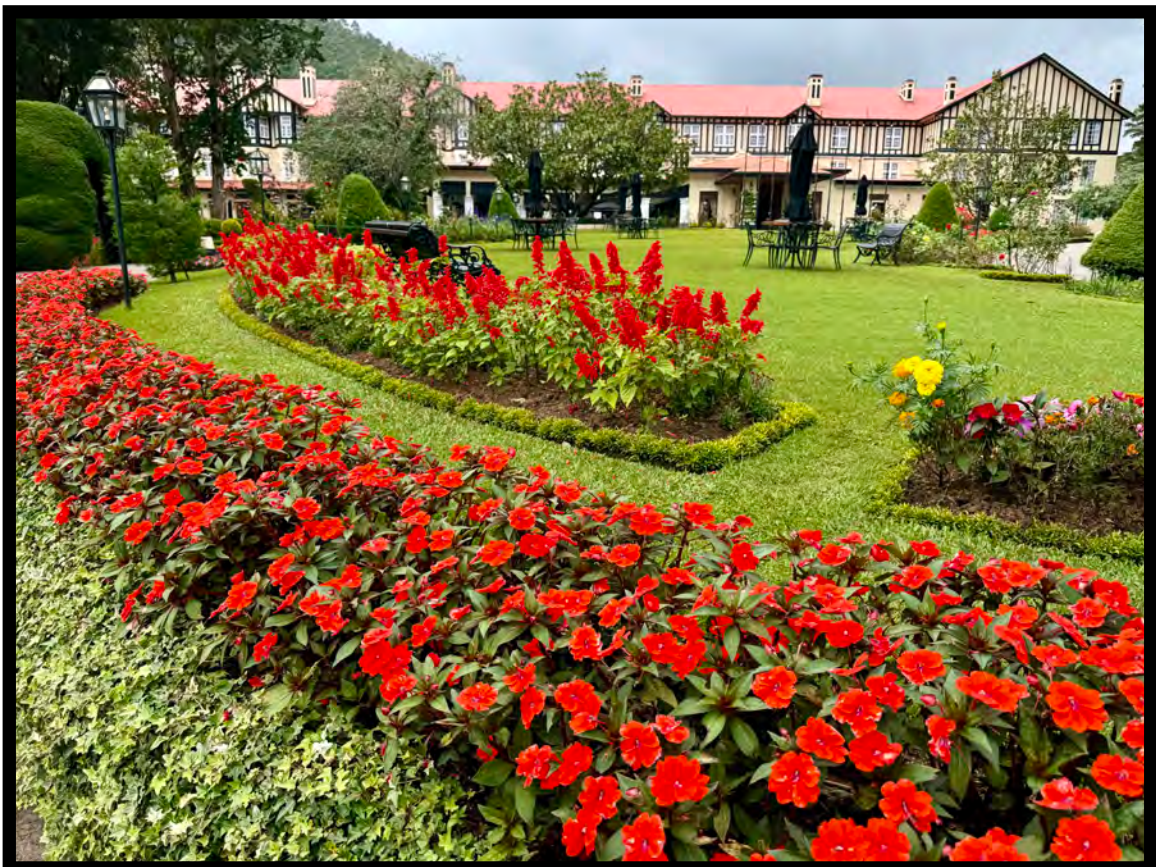


maintains a 1920's style.





Lunch at the Grand Hotel (est. 1891) was elegant inside and out.



We had a dapper saxophonist to play oldies live all during lunch.





The grounds were really worth the visit.





The golf club was definitely old English.



On the way to Eva, we passed terraced plots of vegetables before



arriving At the colorful Temple. The Srirama Jaya is a Hindu temple which was rekindled is a 21st century movie in India. It brings back the nostalgia of the old teachings.



Lots of golden colors seem to attract monkeys. Some scenes that were unknown and not easily understood by us non Hindus.





*Bananas- black, regular and plantains.
Cows with no respect for cars.*



Moving day.





Ella is a town in the province of Uva.. We had a good hotel not far from the cafe Chill which had neat photographic material.





Zugamar negotiated with a tuktuk operator for us lazy hikers for mountainous terrain.



Some exciting rides to see the mountain by seat or zip line were available.





The famous nine arch railway bridge was built from 1919-21. There was a steel shortage because of World War I so a Sri Lankan engineer built the bridge with earth and concrete bricks. It has survived 100 years providing train service every two hours. Here is the last time we saw the hardy Australians with the tuk tuks. Because we walked to the hotel, our tuk tuk





driver had to wait until the next day to be paid.

Near this waterfall a deadly bus accident occurred just a few years ago.



Curd is made fresh every morning which will last a day without refrigeration. It is best served with kit threads. This delicacy is sold from many roadside stands.



Pepper

Pepper is grown on a vine. It comes in four colors depending on when and how it is harvested.





spice involves specific techniques that create the distinctive characteristics of each pepper type. These processing differences explain why black, white, green, and red pepper varieties have unique flavors, colors, and culinary applications.

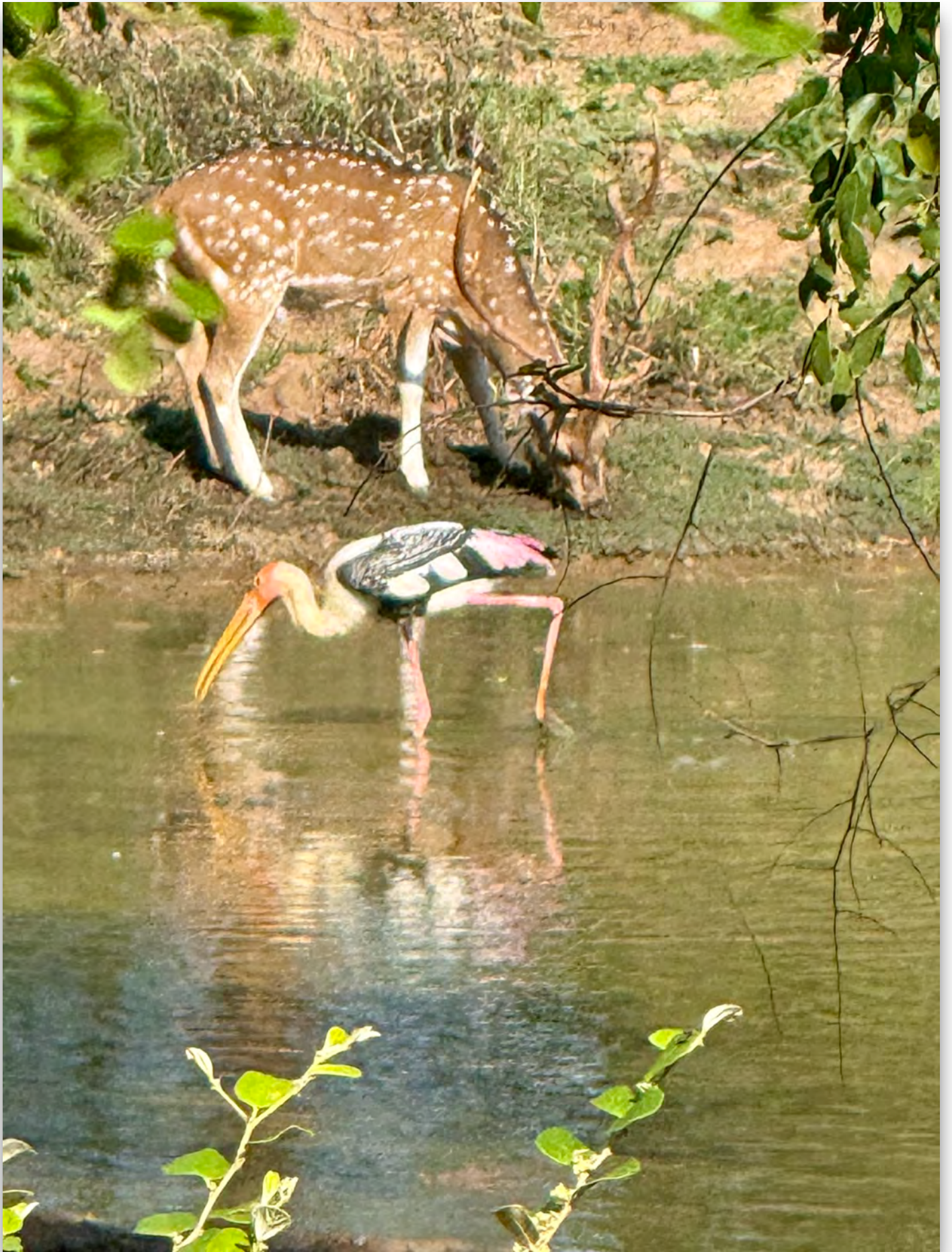
Pepper Type	Harvest Stage	Processing Method	Flavor Profile
Black Pepper	Unripe (green to yellow)	Boiled briefly then sun-dried 7-10 days	Sharp, pungent, complex with floral notes
White Pepper	Fully ripe (red)	Soaked to remove outer layer, then dried	Milder, earthier, less complex
Green Pepper	Unripe (green)	Vinegar brine, freeze-drying, or sulfur dioxide	Fresh, herbal, less pungent
Red Pepper	Fully ripe (red)	Preserved in brine or freeze-dried	Fruity, sweet, mild heat

Black Pepper Production: The Most Common Variety

The Yala National Park was a smorgasbord of scenery and animals









The last one, an eagle at rest



Anu's Cool Nest, our first lodging in the Southern Province, was a whole house in

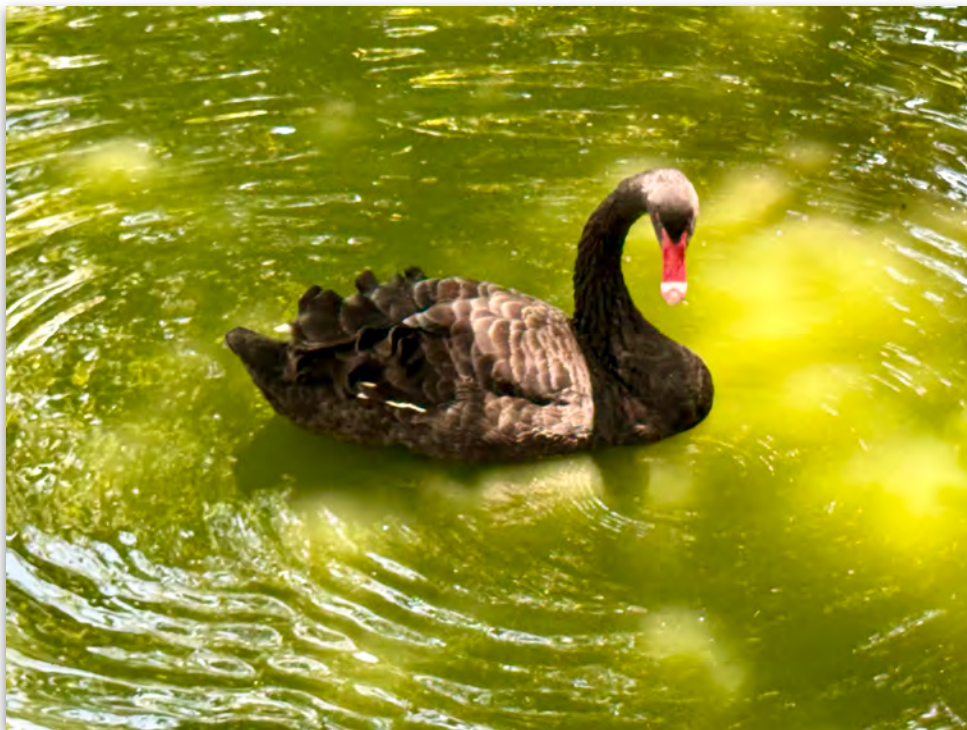


Tissamaharama (Town). His hospitality included jumping over a wall to pick fresh mangoes for our breakfast. He certainly did not suffer from

shyness.



To see the Birds Research Center we had a fancy, chauffeured golf cart. They did have some exotic birds though, including white peacocks.







Mirissa, a coastal town on the Laccadive Sea is a well known spot to go for whale watching.





We had some nice scenery but no luck seeing a whale.
Again our lodging was not only wonderful but inexpensive.



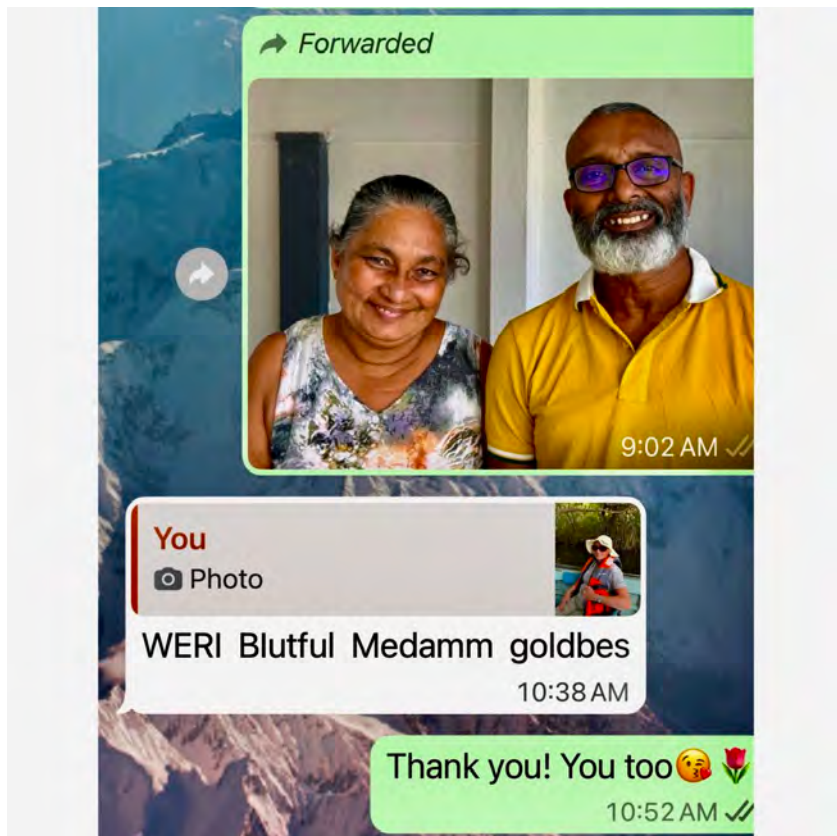
Galle is the largest city on the Southwestern tip of Sri Lanka.



Here our lodging was so special. Hermanthi Sandya served us



breakfast graced by the nature on the lawn. Her husband, Shantha



Oeshapriya, provided a high bedroom and bath



impeccably clean. Hermanthi's note for the portrait was endearing. Their son, Vimukthi joined us for dinner. He made a special trip from Colombo (55 miles away) for this occasion. Their property was shielded from the beach and road by a high wall for ultimate privacy. Their hospitality could hardly be matched anywhere.



Vimukthi Deshapriya



Telwatta was a place of high emotion. Here is where the tsunami hit Sri Lanka in 2004. We visited a “do it yourself





DO YOU REMEMBER THE DATE ?



2004 DECEMBER 26



LAST JOURNEY OF THE TSUNAMI TRAIN



1500 PEOPLE WERE KILLED
THE BIGGEST TRAIN TRAGEDY IN THE
WORLD

“ museum about the disastrous event. This lady has created her own account of the tragedy, in her own words.





Also, her brother's grave who was killed during the civil war. Her words really stirred our emotions. This was the only place in the country that suffered from the tsunami.



The visit to a moonstone mine required a hike in the woods to the existing site. No hard hats for these fellows. They used a lighted



candle 50' down for their safety. They would dig horizontally for the silt. The men up top would switch with their compatriots at the bottom every hour. The silt was brought to the surface by a simple wooded winch and bucket. It was then sifted by the water from a nearby spring with a company official present. You never



know if there would be a sapphire or ruby in the mix. This fresh



moonstone looks pretty good. The Borowalage Company had shop



500 meters away along the road. They could refine the gems and make earrings, necklaces or bracelets or any special orders. A phone





call was needed check on the latest Trump tariff at the moment. Marjan did some major purchases there which entitled her to be reimbursed for some of the taxes at the airport.



Cinnamon

We took a boat up the Madu River to learn about cinnamon. On the way, we had a offer to purchase a new pet to take home. We





had to negotiate our way through a mangrove which was fun to a

primitive dock. A short hike brought woods brought us to this



gentleman who gave us some cinnamon tea. He described in depth



about the health benefits derived from his tea. One of them was weight loss. The leaves from the spindly cinnamon trees contain an oil the will give you swollen lips instantly if accidentally applied.. Sri Lankans use this oil as a wonderful disinfectant. When you enter many buildings you are greeted with this pleasant smell. Our host had excellent English as he cut a small limb of a cinnamon tree with his machete. The outer bark is thrown away. The inner bark is used for the cinnamon. He was so gracious to give me a stick of the limb to take home. Cinnamon production in controlled by the





government. The Alba is the most expensive grade.

Here is a chart the chart showing the other grades of spices in Sri Lanka.





The neighbor let us know when the lecture was over.

The Turtle complex failed to make us hungry but was quite colorful.



Kututura had an abundance of roadside fish markets. It is the



major city of the Western district.



Some more goodies from Colombo. The Port City of Dreams was built by the Chinese. All of it is built of fill making new land out into the sea. It is a large endeavor for the future of Colombo.





Other photos of the lighthouse, harbor, town clock., new





parliament building and Starbeans Coffee!





The Pearl City Hotel provided a comfortable rest for the last two nights. Their ample breakfasts had friendly other clients who were Sri Lankan doctors who were returning home now who had fled during the civil war.

Zugamar was very generous to give us a free last day in the country. We picked up some Sri Lankan license plates (souvenirs) and special teas from at least 6 supermarkets.

We celebrated with a coffee and pastries at the Starbeans!



He then invited us to his home in the suburbs at Dehiwala-



Mount Lavinia. Meet Mathuri, his wife and Sajina, his daughter who





prepared a fabulous dinner for us. Another treat was to see their





beautiful house and furnishings.



The ride to the airport had many mixed emotions. Sri Lankans are a friendly and hospitable bunch. I'm so blessed to have differed to Marjan's advice on our first morning in the country. "Well, let's give it a day and see what happens."

Text by John Bucher Herr

Photos and video by John Bucher Herr and Marjan Vuurman

