

Sri Lanka: Tea, sea and safari offer delight at every turn

[The CEO Magazine](#)

"This one is smooth," I say, after swallowing the liquid I have been swirling around my tongue and cheeks. I take another sip.

"Yes, this is our breakfast Arrack," Thilina replies.

His unexpected comment almost makes me spray the smooth golden Ceylon Arrack out of my mouth.

Arrack for breakfast? I've had Champagne and orange juice for breakfast, but Arrack? Like whiskey, but naturally distilled from coconut flowers, Ceylon Arrack is such a stark contrast that the thought of having it for breakfast never crossed my mind.

This wasn't the first time my mind had been opened during my stay at Sri Lanka's three exclusive Resplendent Ceylon Resorts. Each resort's unique activities, meals and luxurious accommodations create a feeling of three different tailor-made, pampering holidays.

Sea

Thilina is the Surf Bar manager at Resplendent Cape

Weligama Resort, which opened in 2014 on Sri Lanka's southern coastline. His unique Arrack masterclass is a rare opportunity to appreciate the island nation's three Arracks. My preference remains the second, the Vat 9 Family Reserve.

During my two-night stay at Cape Weligama, I soaked up the rolling sea views over breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea in the Ocean Terrace Restaurant. Other activities included an hour's pampering in the spa, a cocktail mixology class (taste-testing the two tropical cocktails was another must) and a sunset dinner at Lookout Blue, overlooking the rugged headland.



My mind and stomach were in gastronomic heaven.

The seven-course gourmet dinner cooked before my eyes by Executive Sous Chef Ishara Wijesinghe at Tableau was exquisite. Melt-in-mouth zucchini-wrapped crab mousse, butter-poached lobster tail freshly plucked from the sea, and Sri Lankan lagoon prawns atop tender pink beef filet

strips. My mind and stomach were in gastronomic heaven. Thankfully, my villa was large enough to do several laps before sinking into the supersoft king-size bed.

If I were a surfing, beachy type, that desire would have also been met. Instead, I was content paddling in my villa's tropical garden-enclosed private swimming pool and lazing beside the adults-only, cliffside half-moon infinity pool that blended effortlessly with the 180-degree cyan sea and sky vista.

Within a stone's throw of the resort, you can stroll the daily roadside fish market stalls, go blue whale watching or check out the nearby towns of Weligama and Galle.

Safari

Constructed in 2017, Wild Coast Tented Lodge is a three-hour drive up the east coast from Weligama. Surrounded by the Yala National Park jungle and facing the turbulent Indian Ocean, guests mingle for drinks each afternoon to waves crashing symphonically over the enormous boulders as the sky fades from cerulean to gold, pink and navy.

No other lights can be seen along the shoreline or at sea unless a ship passes on the horizon. We're cosseted in the Sri Lankan wilderness. In fact, after dark, you aren't allowed to walk outside without a staff member accompanying you.

Wild Coast has 28, white air-conditioned mini kingdom accommodations surrounded by jungle. From my cocoon, I see verdant forests, my private timber deck and plunge pool overlooking a small waterhole where native animals pause to drink, oblivious to my spying.

Inside, it's luxurious and romantic. The vaulted ceiling and expansive, expedition-chic layout include a massive four-poster king bed, rich tan leather camp-style furniture and a centrally positioned leopard claw-paw copper bath.



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During my three-night stay, I soaked up many bubble baths and wines while surveying the outside wilderness between my curry cooking class, rejuvenating spa treatment, delicate English afternoon tea and seaside lantern-lit evening dinner.

However, the main activity is the three-hour morning or afternoon game park safaris. Each has its own charm, and you can choose as many as you wish during your stay.

Sri Lanka's second-largest national park, Yala, covers 979 square kilometers and has the highest concentration of leopards globally. They're still elusive, and while I didn't see a leopard, I reveled in the beauty of the wild elephant families, sloth bears, water buffalo, spotted deer, white-breasted sea eagles, peacocks and more. The drive ventures through picturesque dense jungle, grassy plains, semi-arid scrublands, scenic coastal lagoons, and scattered historical ruins and artifacts. Safaris on either side of mine did encounter leopards.

The drive between Wild Coast and Ceylon Tea Trails is six hours on primarily windy mountain roads. While many choose the shorter 30-minute seaplane ride, landing on Castlereagh Lake, I found the drive interesting. There were many [scenic stops](#), including Ella, with the Instagram-famous Nine Arch Bridge, Nuwara Eliya and the 200-year-old Elizabethan-style Grand Hotel, the main tea center of Hatton, and numerous cascading waterfalls, including Kital, Kuda Ravana, Devon and St Claire.

Tea

On arrival at Norwood, in Sri Lanka's [UNESCO](#) World Heritage Central Highlands, I felt like royalty with my own personal silver-sarong-clad butler and executive chef.

One of five Ceylon Tea Trails historic planter's bungalows, Norwood is the highest, perched at a lofty 1,250 meters among steep mountainside emerald tea plantations. Similarly set, the others enjoy glistening Castlereagh Lake views.

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butler and executive chef.

Spread across 2,000 hectares and opened in 2005, each bungalow has five or six stately rooms and grand bathrooms. They embody the peacefully calming natural surroundings, inviting you to slow down and literally smell the floral gardens and cooler mountain air. It's the perfect blend of past and present.

Relax poolside, pursue timeless classics like croquet, tennis and billiards, read old and new books from the library or languish over a classic afternoon tea while watching the butterflies and bees hop from flower to flower. You won't find any printed menus here either; your chef discusses and plans all gourmet meals with you daily.

Perfect blend

If you're feeling energetic, kayak on the lake, hike or mountain bike on the many trails. But everyone enjoys the quintessential guided Dunkeld Tea Factory Tour, complete with tea tasting. Bernard's narrative gave me a new appreciation for tea, especially Dilmah, which is still handpicked.

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Merrill J Fernando, the Founder of Dilmah Tea, conceived the lavish [Resplendent Ceylon Resorts](#). Today, his sons, Malik and Dilhan, run them, and they are the only members of Relais & Chateaux in Sri Lanka.

While each resort ensures you are of utmost importance, your stay feels even more rewarding knowing that 15 percent of all profits from Dilmah teas and these resorts support humanity through the work of the [MJF Charitable Foundation and Dilmah Conservation](#), funding and managing over 70 projects in 15 locations across Sri Lanka.