

PARADISE FOUND

Sri Lanka



The idyllic infinity pool looks out onto natural beauty as far as the eye can see

Grazia Fashion & Beauty Editor Charlotte Blair jets to Sri Lanka to discover endless white sandy beaches, rolling surf and flavoursome food served underneath the stars

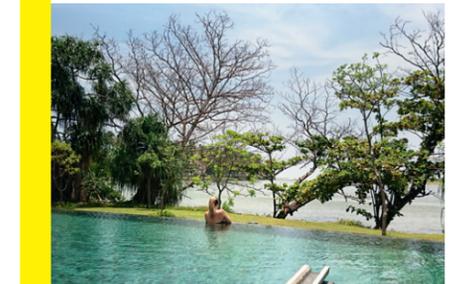
FOR THE ZEN SEEKER

Anantara Kalutara

THE NEWEST ADDITION TO THE Sri Lankan luxury hotel scene is Anantara's second idyllic resort on the island, Kalutara. Situated on the south-west coast, nestled between the Indian Ocean and the Kalu Ganga river, views from the private lagoon in front of the resort stretch to the river, and beyond to the vast Indian Ocean, which, in my opinion, is a horizon that can't be beaten.

On arrival at the hotel, the very first thing that hits me is the warm, welcoming charm the island is famous for. Guided in by Kandyan drummers and traditional Sri Lankan dancers, on stepping through the open-aired entrance what greets me is nothing other than picturesque. The 141 luxury rooms, suites and villas are surrounded by lush vegetation, an idyllic pool and breathtaking views of where the river meets the Indian Ocean. It's blissful in its tranquillity, heavenly in its charming rural appeal and the kind

Above: A Deluxe Ocean View Room
Below: Fashion & Beauty Editor Charlotte Blair gazes out from the pool onto the Kalu Ganga river



of place where time and real-world responsibilities are long-forgotten, and my mind slips into relaxation mode sooner than I thought possible.

I begin by curating my own personalised escape. First on the agenda, after a dip in the pool, is to get acquainted with the traditional culture with a fishing expedition on the serene waters of the Kalu Ganga, guided by Mark, our island Fishing Guru. While drifting down the river on a traditional Sri Lankan vessel called an oruwa, he shows us local angling techniques as we sail past his house just next door – giving a wave to his mum as we pass – it doesn't get much more local than that.

Here it seems, island living is all about doing as much or as little as you desire, and the resort offers a list of excursions, from a day trip to the historic Galle Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage site, a turtle hatchery and, as a region famed for its fragrant infusions, a must-visit is the Handunugoda Tea Estate – all of which we manage to squeeze in on the three-hour drive to Anantara's sister hotel, Peace Haven Tangalle Resort the next day.

The afternoon, however, is what I really came for, a cloudless sky and a day that promises nothing but R'n'R. Exploring the rather more peaceful surroundings of the Anantara Spa, it's the perfect place to unwind before an action-packed few days. With dinner under the stars calling, it's a heavenly end to the day.

Left: The lobby boasts views of the Indian Ocean
Below: Private dining under the stars on the beach



FOR THE ADVENTURER

Anantara Peace Haven
Tangalle Resort

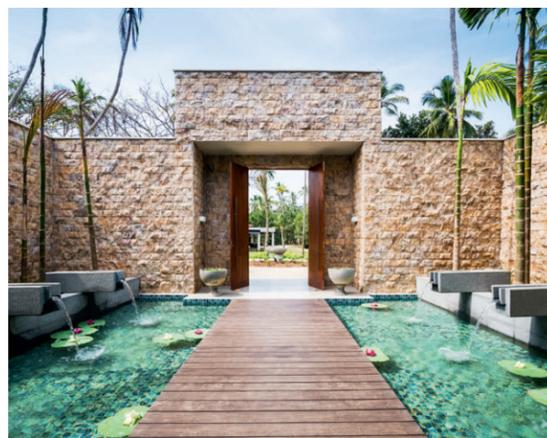
ON THE SOUTH COAST OF Sri Lanka, Anantara's first property in the region lives up to the peaceful haven promised by its name. Set on a secluded stretch of beach amid a 21-acre coconut plantation – within easy reach of the island's plethora of sacred heritage sites and vast national parks of free-roaming wildlife – it boasts both beautiful beaches and a heritage-rich background to keep all holidaymakers happy.

After a windy coastal drive down from the west in one of Anantara's chauffeur-driven cars, a traditional Sri Lankan welcoming ritual greets me, before I catch a glimpse of the vista from the Lobby Lounge terrace, which instantly takes my breath away. Views of the rolling surf splash against the rocks almost as far as the eye can see, and the smell of the fresh sea air instantly puts me in a blissed-out state of tranquillity.

Swiftly whisked away to my room, I get a first glance of the blindingly white sand, a stark contrast from the bright blue sky, crystal clear waters and lush vegetation of the gardens filled with local wildlife. It's



Above: Elephants at the Udawalawe National Park. Left: Fashion & Beauty Editor Charlotte Blair in her happy place. Below: The spa water walk way.



truly spectacular, and I'm suddenly desperate to dip my toes into the Indian Ocean.

With four types of villas to choose from, this palatial resort has 152 rooms, ranging from apartments to pool villas, stretched across lush gardens full of wildlife begging to be explored. My pick is a villa with a private pool – naturally – which overlooks a family of monkeys playfully swinging from tree to tree.

The resort feels incredibly private, whether you decide to lie on the palm-tree shaded beach or by the multilayer pool with a coconut in hand – sourced by a local villager who scales the heights of the trees to bring you the freshest produce – taking in the stunning vistas in every direction, you'll rarely bump into another sunseeker.

However, after a relaxing few days poolside, I'm ready to get stuck into the long list of activities the resort has to offer. First up on the Tangalle activity roster is Udawalae National Park, just an hour's drive from the resort, and one of the world's best places to see wild elephants. Surrounded by grasslands of bush

and forest, it's also one of the best national parks in Sri Lanka for game spotting. As a huge animal lover, this was top of my list.

Next up is an interactive culinary experience, so if you fancy yourself as a bit of a foodie, like me, or would like to expand your current recipe repertoire, I thoroughly recommend booking the hotel's Spice Spoons tour. Beginning with a short ride in a local tuk-tuk accompanied by one of the resort's head chefs, we head to the local fish and vegetable markets, to pick our produce. Once back at the hotel, we're taught how to prepare a dozen traditional Sri Lankan dishes from scratch, before getting to feast on the sumptuous fruits of our labour for lunch.

Only a five-hour flight from Dubai, Sri Lanka is a holiday destination of two halves and speaks to the inner traveller in me, with just the right dose of adventure versus horizontal beach days. Blissful, cultural and deliciously more-ish, I can't wait to return. 🍴

• Visit www.anantara.com to book



Top left: One of the heavenly beach villas. Top right: Charlotte showcases her culinary skills at the Spice Spoons Sri Lankan Cooking Class



The beach villa by night is the ideal setting to watch the sun go down



Words: Charlotte Blair. Photos: Supplied