

Fall in love with action-packed Sri Lanka

For our honeymoon, my husband and I longed for adventure. Not content with just a beach holiday, we wanted variety and activity on our trip of a lifetime, and tropical Sri Lanka proved to be the dream destination.

After the 10-and-a-half hour flight, we arrived at the opulent Maniumpathy hotel in Colombo. This colonial oasis is a myriad of calm in the bustling capital city with individually designed rooms and a tranquil pool – the perfect place to recover and recharge for our travels ahead.

Heading north, through villages above the historical town of Kandy, we were greeted by the timeless splendour of The Kandy House. With only nine rooms, each with a private butler, this hotel was the ultimate in boutique romance.

We spent our day relaxing by the infinity pool, where parakeets perched in the palms overhead and tree frogs chirped at dusk. By night, the hotel's lush gardens dripped in magical fairy lights as we sipped our sundowners. It was hard to imagine a more romantic hideaway.

Next was south to Yala National Park and Noel Rodrigo's Leopard Safaris. Staying in the five-star tents, this was hardly hardcore camping – we even got a hot shower under the stars. But there's no forgetting you are in the jungle, a fact we were reminded of as we stumbled across a scorpion right outside our tent and woke up to a sizeable lizard in the loo.

After an eye-watering 4.45am wake-up call, we set off for the park. The trackers at Noel Rodrigo's pride themselves on getting you away from the other jeeps, and we felt like we had the 979 square kilometres site to ourselves. While keeping a lookout for leopards, we were entertained by sightings of crocodiles, lizards, buffalo, incredible bird life and a deadly king cobra.

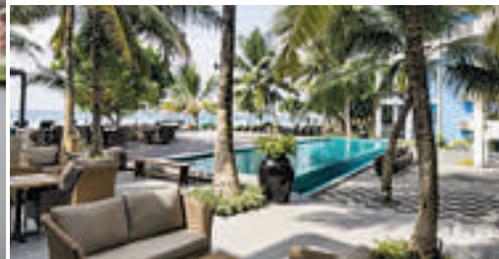
Finally, towards the end of our five-hour safari, our hawk-eyed guide Basindu glimpsed some camouflaged spots under a tree. Before long, the big cat got up nonchalantly and slinked into the jungle with a flick of its tail. Breathtaking.

After our safari, it was time for an adventure of a different kind, and we travelled to Ahangama to Soul & Surf. This chic jungle hideaway is just a few minutes' rickshaw drive to Sri Lanka's stunning south coast – a surfers' paradise with a wide variety of breaks to suit all levels. The inclusive experience provides a busy schedule of yoga and surf lessons, as well as some of the best food we had in Sri Lanka.

As well as surfers, the waters of Sri Lanka are famous for the mighty blue whale. We booked



Clockwise from above: Ride some waves at Soul & Surf; the charming Owl And The Pussycat hotel; Maniumpathy is the perfect place to escape the capital city of Colombo



with Raja & The Whales, which is slightly more expensive than other companies, but when faced with a large Indian Ocean swell and whales of up to 30 metres in length, we were glad we were with the pros. With a focus on the whales' welfare, the Raja team not only found us seven whales, but also knew when to leave the animals in peace.

For our last stop, we travelled along the coast to Thalpe and the boutique Owl And The Pussycat Hotel. Themed on the famous Edward Lear poem, it has a wonderful position right on the roaring coast. Owner Reita's global travels have shaped the interiors into a colourful mix of local eclectic pieces and worldwide treasures.

Sri Lanka gave us the honeymoon we'd hoped for and we left truly in love with the country.

Sally-Anne Argyle

Stay at the Owl And The Pussycat Hotel (otphotel.com) from £250 per night, plus a 10 per cent service fee; at The Kandy House (thekandyhouse.com) from £243 per room, per night, on a B&B basis; and at Maniumpathy (maniumpathy.com) from £216 per room, per night, on a B&B basis. Noel Rodrigo's Leopard Safaris (leopardsafaris.com) start from around £700 per night for two people. Rates are all-inclusive (including game drives, activities, park fees and taxes). A seven-night stay at Soul & Surf (soulandsurf.com) starts from £750 per person based on two sharing a room on an all-inclusive basis including a full surf and yoga programme. Entry to Heathrow T3 No.1 lounge costs £36 per adult (no1lounges.com).